

November 7, 2024

ITUC-Africa's Key Role in TUCNA's Inclusion in Namibia's AfCFTA National Implementation Committee



Picture: ITUC-Africa General Secretary and Delegation, TUCNA Secretary General Delegation, Hon. Minister for Industrialization and Trade(MIT), Namibia, Executive Director at the MIT and other MIT officers.

In a significant step forward for the labour movement in Africa, the *Honourable Lucia lipumbu*, Minister for Industrialisation and Trade of Namibia, officially welcomed the Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA) as a member of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) National Implementation Committee (NIC). This landmark development is the culmination of dedicated advocacy efforts led by ITUC-Africa with the support of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland through the Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland (SASK), showcasing its unwavering commitment to ensuring the inclusion of trade unions in critical policymaking bodies. Including TUCNA in the NIC marks a pivotal moment for labour representation in Namibia's trade and industrialisation strategy. The achievement was secured during a strategic advocacy visit by an ITUC-Africa delegation led by *Comrade Akhator Joel Odigie*, General Secretary of ITUC-Africa. The delegation included *Comrade Mahongora Kavihuha*, Secretary General of TUCNA and the TUCNA leadership. This advocacy engagement highlights ITUC-Africa's pivotal role in fostering collaborative partnerships and

amplifying workers' voices at continental decision-making platforms. The meeting was held at the Ministry of Industrialisation and Trade in Namibia on November 7, 2024.

Broader Engagements and Collaborative Dialogues

The meeting with the Ministry of Industrialisation and Trade provided a platform for ITUC-Africa to emphasise the essential role of trade unions in shaping trade and industrial policies, particularly within the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA). Comrade Joel Odigie underscored the importance of an inclusive approach, noting, "Our business is not lamentation. Workers are at the centre of trade. How do we promote women and youth in trade, especially women in informal trade? The AfCFTA National Implementation Committee" should be an inclusive committee." This assertion was supported by Minister lipumbu, who affirmed the government's commitment to ensuring trade union participation and encouraged unions to engage the Ministry for inclusion actively. It was also noted that the relationship between the Namibian government and trade unions has historically been cordial and cooperative, with unions regularly contributing to public policy consultations. This collaborative dynamic was evidenced in the recent launch of Namibia's national trade policy, which featured substantial input from trade unions. Including TUCNA in the NIC is expected to bolster this collaborative approach further and enable comprehensive representation in shaping the country's implementation of the AfCFTA.



ITUC-General Secretary (Right) Comrade Akhator Joel Odigie & Minister for Industrialization and Trade, Hon Lucia lipumbu (left)

Key Highlights of the Discussions

During the visit, several critical areas of engagement were addressed:

- Minister lipumbu emphasised the Ministry's focus on industrialisation as a means to infuse the market with locally produced goods and to support the

growth of small and medium-scale industries. This strategic push aims at achieving self-reliance and long-term sustainability. ITUC-Africa lauded Namibia's industrialisation thrust within its trade arrangements and called for a conscious approach to human capacity building through skills development and access to social provisions.

- ITUC-Africa called for the inclusion of labour safeguards and provisions within the AfCFTA protocol to protect workers' interests and promote equitable participation.
- ITUC-Africa General Secretary Comrade Joel Odigie highlighted the critical importance of the Africa Union's Free Movement Protocol (FMP) as a trade facilitator, noting that countries like Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, and Benin have set commendable examples by removing visa regimes for Africans, thus making it easier for Africans to travel to those countries. Sadly, only four African countries (Rwanda, Niger, Mali and Cote d'Ivoire) have ratified the protocol. ITUC-Africa urged Namibia to improve its African visa facilitation and ratify the AU FMP. Minister lipumbu pledged to investigate the protocol and engage relevant ministries to advance its ratification.
- The Ministry's ongoing work on digital trade and e-commerce policies was also discussed. The Ministry's Executive Director acknowledged that these policies are integral to modern trade frameworks and indicated that progress is being made in collating tariff structures, with plans for the first shipments under AfCFTA to commence soon.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs' review of the migration bill, set for further discussions on November 11, underscores Namibia's broader commitment to aligning with progressive trade and movement policies. Minister lipumbu noted that Namibia is poised to address and reciprocate immigration practices, ensuring a balanced trade and labour movement approach.

Paving the Way for Future Collaborations

Minister lipumbu's pledge to strengthen engagements with trade unions and the Ministry's readiness to receive nominations from TUCNA signal an era of strengthened partnerships. The assurance of continued dialogue and cooperation bodes well for Namibia's trade and industrial landscape, positioning it to benefit from inclusive growth driven by informed and participatory policymaking. ITUC-Africa's role in advocating for TUCNA's inclusion in the NIC exemplifies its broader commitment to enhancing workers' influence in trade and economic policies across Africa. This milestone is an inspiring example for other trade unions and governments, demonstrating that collaborative efforts can lead to substantial and meaningful participation in shaping Africa's future.

By ALREI, ITUC-Africa